

Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce

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Press Release

For Release June 7, 2003

Agriculture Leaders to Convene in Mississippi

Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture Lester Spell is hosting Commissioners of Agriculture from fifteen southern states in Jackson, Mississippi, June 7-11, to address regional agriculture's economics, marketing opportunities, environmental issues, and share successful efforts in each of the states.

Commissioner Spell, President of Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture (SASDA), said, "In hosting this important conference, we are being given the opportunity to showcase the diversity and quality we have not only in our agriculture in Mississippi, but also in our culture, history, and other industries that will be demonstrated during the conference. A meeting between so many State Agriculture Commissioners affords a wide perspective and offers the chance to develop solutions to challenging issues and discover innovative methods to add value to the agricultural resources that we all have available."

The five-day event includes a wide variety of activities for attendees including visits to Mississippi's attractions and businesses, splendid food and entertainment catered by local citizens, and a forum covering a wide array of agricultural related topics. With environmental and health concerns on the forefront of today's agriculture, related topics presented include issues involving water quality, pesticide use, plant and animal disease, noxious weeds, and the overall scope of environmental affairs facing southern agriculture.

Promotion and usage of southern agricultural products is another theme for forum presentations. Topics cover new uses for agricultural products in alternative energies, which can potentially decrease our nation's dependence on foreign, petroleum-based fuels, while at the same time stimulate the farm economy. Other product innovations covered include value-added applications using soybean byproducts and young pine thinnings. Additional presentations provide updates on Mississippi agricultural industries and successful statewide marketing programs.

Over the course of the convention, participants are touring a number of locations in the area. Several museums and parks are visited. A bus tour is making stops at the

Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum, the Engineering Research and Development Center in Vicksburg, the Vicksburg National Military Park, and the Natural Science Museum. A historical view of Mississippi is offered by a visit to the Cedar Grove Plantation in Vicksburg, a tour of downtown Vicksburg, a walkthrough in Jackson's Fondren area, and a reception at the Governor's Mansion. Mississippi-based businesses such as Primos Game Calls and Debeukelaer's, both of Madison County are depicted as model participants in the Department's Make Mine Mississippi Program. The tour concludes with a drive by the recently dedicated Nissan facility.

"My staff and I have worked hard in preparation for the 2003 SASDA Convention, and we look forward to the relationships that are built and the positive ideas that will emerge," Spell said. "With the adversity facing agriculture today and the importance of agriculture in Mississippi and the South, collaborative efforts, like SASDA, and additional, innovative uses for our agricultural resources will assist in bringing profitability back to our farmers and Mississippi agriculture. I am proud for our visitors to see firsthand what we are accomplishing in our state."